An Interview with MIKE ANDERSON

An Oral History produced by
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Esmeralda County History Project
Esmeralda County, Nevada
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PREFACE

The Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the recordings of the interviews and their transcriptions.

The Esmeralda County Board of Commissioners initiated the ECHP in 1993 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Esmeralda County communities that may be impacted by the construction of a high-level nuclear waste repository located at Yucca Mountain, adjoining the Nevada Test Site in Nye County. Though the repository has yet to be built, the ten oral histories in this group of interviews were paid for by county monies received in connection with the Yucca Mountain effort, which is now in hiatus.

In themselves, oral history interviews are *not* history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the ECHPôs operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the ECHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts, and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherence. The type font contains no

symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the ECHP will, in preparing a text:

a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the *uhs*, *ahs* and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;

b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;

d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and

e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from participating individuals. I was welcomed into many homes and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. I thank the residents throughout Esmeralda County and Nevadað too numerous to mention by nameð who provided assistance and information. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to the Esmeralda County Commissioners who initiated the project in 1993: Chairman Wade Barton, Virginia Ridgway, and Joyce Hartman. Appreciation also goes to current Chairman Nancy J. Boland, William C. Kirby, and Dominick Pappalardo, who initiated the current project in 2012, and to Ralph M. Keyes, who became a commissioner in 2013. Ed Mueller, Director, Esmeralda County Repository Oversight Program, gave enthusiastic support and advocacy for this effort. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Muellerôs office, provided funds for this round of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioners Boland, Kirby, Pappalardo, Keyes, and Mr. Mueller for their input regarding the conduct of this research and for serving as a sounding board as we worked out methodological problems. These interviews would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Esmeralda County commissioners and Mr. Mueller.

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Jean Charney and Robert B. Clark transcribed a number of interviews, as did the staff of Pioneer Transcription Services in Penn Valley, California. Julie Lancaster and Suzy McCoy provided project coordination. Editing was

done by Jean Charney and Darlene Morse. Proofreading and indexing were provided at various times by Darlene Morse and Marilyn Anderson. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as accurately as possible, the spelling of peopleôs names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Eva La Rue and Angela Haag of the Central Nevada Museum and Suzy McCoy served as consultants throughout the project; their participation was essential. Much-deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

All material for the ECHP was prepared with the support of the Esmeralda County Nuclear Waste Repository Oversight Program, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect the views of Esmeralda County or the U.S. DOE.

ð Robert D. McCracken
2013

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the close of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Yet, even in the 2010s, the spirit of the American frontier can still be found in Esmeralda County, Nevada, in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents.

Esmeralda County was established by an act of the Territorial Legislature of Nevada on November 23, 1861. The first boom camp in the county, Aurora, named after the goddess of dawn of Roman mythology, mushroomed into existence in the early 1860s with a population of at least 5000. The name Esmeralda, Spanish for "emerald," was provided by a member of the party that made the initial discovery of gold at Aurora; the individual probably had some beauty in mindð the term was then a common name for girls with green eyes. Another version is that the name referred to the Gypsy dancer Esmeralda in Victor Hugoôs novel, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame.* Discoveries at Aurora were followed by others at Columbus (1864), Red Mountain/Silver Peak (1864), Gold Mountain (1866), Palmetto (1866), Montezuma (1867), Oneota (1870), Sylvania (1870), and Lida Valley (1871). Goldfield, which sprang to life in 1902, was the last great mining camp of the American West, and one of the greatest gold camps in the history of the world. Along with Tonopah (1900) and Rhyolite (1904), its two sister boomtowns, and several score of smaller, shorter-lived daughter camps located on the central Nevada desert, Goldfield was the last magnificent flowering of the American frontier.

Between 1903 and 1942, Goldfield produced approximately 7.7 million tons of ore containing more than 4.1 million ounces of gold and over 1.4 million ounces of silver, worth $90 million, mostly when gold was priced at $20 per ounce. Goldfieldôs glory days were from about 1904 until World War I. After approximately 1918, mine production declined to a fraction of what it had been, yet the town lived on. It survived a terrible flash flood in 1913 and a catastrophic fire in 1923 that wiped out a substantial proportion of the townð at least 33 square blocks, by some old-timersô estimates. Another fire in 1924 nearly applied the coup de grâce to the grand lady, but still she persevered.

Much has been written concerning Goldfieldôs prosperous years, but relatively less material is available on the town and its people from the decades following the end of World War I. Much of the history of Esmeralda County is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Esmeralda Countyôs close ties to the land and our nationôs frontier past, and the scarcity of written sources on local history after 1920, the Esmeralda County commissioners initiated the Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP) in 1993. The ECHP is an effort to systematically collect and preserve the history of Esmeralda County. The centerpiece of the ECHP is a set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Esmeralda County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada.

The interviews conducted between 1993 and 1994 vary in length and detail, but together they form an unprecedented composite of life in Esmeralda County after 1920.

These interviews can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is uniqueð some are large, others are smallð yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a view of county history that reveals the flow of life and events for a part of Nevadaôs past that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

A second set of interviews was initiated in 2011. The goal here was the same as for the interviews collected 20 years earlierð provide a view of Esmeralda County history unavailable elsewhere through interviews with county residents. However, in this series interviews were also conducted with a second goal in mind. Over 97 percent of the land in Esmeralda County is controlled and managed by the federal governmentð more than any other county in Nevada; indeed, in any state outside Alaskað and of the private land approximately 50 percent consists of patented mining claims, leaving little opportunity for community expansion on private land. A large percentage of Esmeralda County residents consequently believe the county is in large measure governed by the federal government as opposed to elected state of Nevada, county, and local officials. Many feel the strong presence of the federal government has the effect of constricting economic opportunity and personal freedom for local residents in many areas of life and would like to see changes made in that arrangement with the transfer of more control to local and state government. Those issues formed part of the focus of these oral histories.

ð RDM
2013

This is Robert McCracken talking to Mike Anderson at his office in Goldfield, Nevada, November 29, 2011.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Mike, why don't you tell me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

MA: Michael Jay Anderson.

RM: And when and where were you born?

MA: Portland, Oregon, December 12, 1958.

RM: And could you give me your parents' name?

MA: My father's name was Robert George Anderson and my mother's name was Marjorie Helen Lynnhart Anderson.

RM: Were they from Oregon?

MA: My father was born in Oregon. My mother was adopted— by my great-grandparents, actually— and I don't know a whole bunch about that. I heard it was out of Iowa but I'm not sure.

RM: Do you know when and where they were born?

MA: My dad was born in 1935, and my mother was born in, I think, the same year. He was born August the 9th and she was born on December the 21st.

RM: Did your parents grow up in Oregon?

MA: They did, and they still live there.

RM: What did your father do for a living?

MA: My dad was a millwright in a sawmill most of his life; he also worked logging in his younger days.

RM: Where was he doing that?

MA: We lived in a whole bunch of different places when I was a kid, but around

Portland and Sandy and that area. It was always in the Willamette Valleyð thatôs where I grew up.

RM: How did you end up in Nevada?

MA: Well, I went in the navy when I got out of high school. When I got out of the service, logging and the lumber industry just went to crap.

RM: Why did it go to crap?

MA: It was hard economic times. It was right after Jimmy Carter got out of office and it was a bad economy. So I went to welding school for a year or so after the service. I moved to Arizona with some friends and I worked a couple of different jobs. I did some gold-mining work and I also did some underground pipeline work. Back in 1984, I moved out here with those people. We opened up a pilot mill out by the Cottontail Ranch, 15 miles from here.

RM: What kind of mill was it?

MA: A gold pilot mill. We were trying to pick out gold out there.

RM: The Cottontail was still going then?

MA: Oh, yes, it was going good then. But the mining didnôt work out. I came to work for Esmeralda County for a couple of years, working for Goldfield Utilities. Then I went back to mining over in Silver Peak for a number of years. Then I was a contract mechanic welder for a number of years. I came and started work with Esmeralda County in 1996 and Iôve been working there ever since. Now Iôm the public works supervisor for the county.

RM: And what does that involve?

MA: We take care of all the buildings and grounds and manage all the public works projects the county hasð buildings, construction of different things. I also operate and run

the water treatment system and sewer treatment system for the town of Goldfield.

RM: That's a pretty big responsibility, isn't it?

MA: Yes. I was also on the volunteer fire department for about 24 years, and I was fire chief for 13 of them. But it got to be too much, so now somebody else does that.

RM: Just to back up a bit, what gold mine were you working at in Arizona? And what were you doing?

MA: We were actually putting in a pilot mill. It was outside of a place called La Gurda, which was pretty close to Yuma— over on the Arizona border. When my friend and I moved there, we were half the population. I mean, it was four people. We were doing some experimental stuff trying to get gold out. And that, of course, didn't pan out.

RM: Was the gold hard to extract?

MA: Yes. I can't remember if the people actually ran out of money, but that kind of fell through and we landed here in Goldfield.

RM: And you said you worked in a gold operation here. Where was that?

MA: I worked up where the 16-to-1 mill is.

RM: Where's that?

MA: It's five miles south, southeast of Silver Peak, up in the hills. Sunshine Mining owned it. Then I worked for a place called Zephyr Mining, and it was bought out by Art Wilson. It closed down around 1990. I picked up work about a month later at a mine here that opened up in Goldfield. We probably worked there for a year and a half, two years.

RM: What mine was that?

MA: It was American Resources at the time; they changed the name a couple of times. I was a contract welder and also did other stuff for them. We set up the collection system and the mill system, worked on heavy equipment.

RM: Was that when they were milling the old dumps here?

MA: They worked in the Combination pit and thereôs another pitð I forget the name of it.

RM: Is there still gold in the ground in Goldfield?

MA: Oh, hopefully. I had a visit from a fellow from Metallic Goldfieldð it used to be Marcoð the other day. They plan to open up a mine here in the next three years; theyôve been consolidating properties. They have a couple of pitsð McMahon is one and then around the Gemfield cutoff on the road, where theyôll actually have to move the highway and the waterlines and our power lines and one fiber-optic line because they go right through the middle of where their pit would be.

RM: Is it right in Goldfield?

MA: Itôs about a mile out of town, right at the Gemfield turnoff. Itôs going to be close to where the old stamp mill was, a little bit east of that. As I said, the highway runs right through the middle of their pit. Now, whether it happens or not, you know, I canôt say. But Iôm hoping it does because it will be a big boon for our town.

The plan is that we would move the highway slightly so it makes a slight curve and then comes back into town before the cemetery and all of that. Then itôs going to make a gradual turn so it goes around their pit. When they were here the other day they were asking about infrastructure and things about the town. I believe they would bring 60 to 100 permanent people, but some of those would probably go to Tonopah.

RM: But some of them would live here.

MA: Thereôs not a whole lot of housing here. Hopefully weôve got some entrepreneurs who could build some houses. They actually stated that they didnôt want to get into the housing business, and I understand that. Some mines actually do housing, just because of

where theyôre located and that kind of thing. It will be nice to get some more people here in town and bring in some jobs. This place needs jobs very badly.

RM: Yes. Are they going to do heap leaching?

MA: I asked them a lot of questions and I never did ask them that. They were here probably an hour and a half and I guess we never got to that point. We had a pretty good discussion. They were going to put in a processing plant, but I donôt know if thatôs going to be an ADR heap leach or a high-grade mill. Iôve worked in both kinds.

RM: What kind of land issues are they going to have to deal with?

MA: The unique thing about this company is that unlike other mining companies that have come in the not-too-distant pastô back in the ô90sô theyôve been consolidating a whole bunch of patented claims and theyôve blocked out their ore. Theyôve got two places where they want to start mining right away, but then they can start drilling on other properties that they actually own so they can keep mining.

RM: Do they have some pretty good ore blocked out?

MA: I heard that they had really good ore blocked out.

RM: Itôs great that thereôs still good ore left here.

MA: Back in the day when they were mining in Goldfield, it was super labor-intensive but they had really high-grade ore underground. Nowadays they have ways of taking and processing lower-grade ore. Thatôs what most of the mines in Nevada do now is mine low-grade ore.

RM: Yes. The grade of ore that they mine at Round Mountain, for instance, is shocking.

MA: Yes, and Round Mountain is a regular gold mine. In fact, I was just in Elko and the mines are going great down there. They provide very good-paying jobs. I went into

the Star Restaurant, my favorite Basque restaurant there, and they were saying in 2011 they had six underground operations running in Elko. I know they have a couple of open pits there, too.

RM: And theyôre high-tonnage underground operations, arenôt they?

MA: Oh, Iôm sure. I thought it was kind of impressive that they had six running at the same time as their open pits. I donôt know if Goldfield will ever get that big or if we even want it to get that big, but it would be nice to have some good jobs so we could move some families in here and have kids in the school again. I think there are only 20 kids in our school here, K through 8.

RM: Does a mining company have to jump through a lot of hoops to get an operation like that going?

MA: Yes, they do. Apparentlyð and these are the words of Kevin Keating. Heôs the manager of Nevada operations for International Minerals; thatôs the name of the company. He said that BLM was on notice from someone, the president, Congress, to fast-track some of these mines to help the economy. Nevada has a lot of resources. Around here, there are very few people who donôt like mining. This town wouldnôt be here if it wasnôt for mining and Nevada might not even be a state if it werenôt for the mines; I think it would have been part of Utah and all that.

But he said that BLM had to fast-track the permits to 18 months, which is very fast. The other day, I went to the BLM office here in Tonopah for a different reason. I wanted to talk to the person there a little bit. I asked her, ñWhat about this fast-tracking?ò

She said, ñWeôre going to drop everything weôre doing and do those instead,ò instead of looking at our stuff and thinking that theyôre going to charge us rent for this and that. The BLM is very difficult to deal with. Some people say, ñOh, they arenôt

difficult to deal with.ò The people are nice, but they just have so many rules about land issues and everything.

RM: What are some of the rules that you have encountered with the BLM?

MA: One of the things is our water. For example, the wells that weôre using today were put in the early ô80s and weôve never been charged rent for that land. I mean, we have to pay what they call an RP&P lease. Iôm not sure exactly how that works but itôs so much every three years or something. Then they come along and say, ñWe should be charging you rent on this.ò

RM: You mean for the well being on public ground?

MA: Yes, and the pipeline coming in. I think, ñHey, itôs a public useð the public is using their land. Why are you charging the public rent to use public land?ò I really question the way BLM does things. When youôre talking to them, they usually talk like they have the title to the land youôre standing on their back pocket and youôre trespassing. I think the way they do things is non-user friendly. Iôm not faulting the people that actually work thereð I think itôs the red tape they have to go through.

RM: If you could have your druthers, how would you want them to operate?

MA: As far as the water system goes, if we want to get water to the citizens of a town, we shouldnôt be charged rent for that. From the early ô80s weôve been getting our water from the wells that weôre presently using. Theyôre 11 miles out of town up north on the highway. Then all of a sudden, you know, they charge us. They say, ñWe donôt charge you back rent.ò Okay.

Weôre going through a process now. We built an arsenic treatment plan. We put in this arsenic treatment plant because they changed the arsenic rule. It used to be 50 parts per billion and they changed it to ten so now weôve got to treat our water. We took out a

loan and got a grant, but it was probably half-and-half. These are substantial amounts of money when youôve only got 270 customers.

RM: How much were the loans?

MA: I think the loan and the grant was, like, $1.5 million for the water treatment plant, which we havenôt gotten. We did a substantial completion inspection; I just got done with that less than an hour ago. But now that we have that plant in, they want to sell it. They donôt want anything to do with the arsenic treatment business, but the land . . . itôs absolutely on the side of the hill. We dug it out and put the tank there and then they say, ñWell, we had to have it appraised and itôs worth this much money.ò

RM: Is it a high price?

MA: Itôs actually come down because of the economyð land prices have come down. So actually now is probably a safe time to buy it. But still, theyôre selling land that would never be used. I mean, itôs so steep you can hardly stand on it and they want to charge a fee because we cut a road into it. All the improvements were done by the utility company and the county and the town, but now theyôre going to sell us that land. Itôs going to be several thousand dollarsð I think they should just grant the land to us.

RM: They should have given it to you. Youôre almost doing them a favor.

MA: Yes, and they didnôt like the colors I picked out for the doors. [Laughs] They were green because my favorite colorôs green.

RM: Do they have a problem there?

MA: No, Wendy Seley just started complaining, Wendyôs actually a very nice ladyð I mean, she tries to help us. Like I say, her hands are kind of tied. Anyway, she started saying something about the green door. Then she said, ñWell, Iôm not going to worry about that because youôre going to own the land pretty soon.ò [Laughter]

I also think there are a lot of mixed feelings about the way the BLM handles the wild horses and burros here. Wild horses and burros populate an area pretty fast. My feeling is, I like to see them out there; I mean, theyôre enjoyable. A lot of people say, ñTheyôre not a part of the natural landscape.ò But neither are people in the landscape, as far as Iôm concerned. Thereôs a lot of controversy about the way they round them up with helicopters; some of them get injured. Then they take them and put them in pens up by Lovelock or something. Theyôre not wild horses when you put them in a pen. They go through an adoption process and all of that stuff and Iôm not sure what actually happens to them. People get really upset when they see BLM rounding them with a helicopter.

On the other hand, Iôve also seen it where theyôve overpopulated an area and the springs would dry up or something. I think a spring dried up one year on Lone Mountain. They drove all those horses down there and just overpopulated the area. Itôs worse to see them starving and dying of thirst than it is to have them rounded up by a helicopter.

RM: How would you handle the wild horse grazing issue if you were calling the shots?

MA: This is what Iôd do, and I might be totally off base. Ten or more years ago, we had a county commissioner named Ben Viljoen. He was a commissioner in Silver Peak. I believe it was the Shoshone Indians who came and asked if the county would support the Shoshones taking over the wild horse management from the BLM.

I think they should give them a shot. I donôt know all the BLMôs rules, but I think the systemôs broken and the Indians could actually manage them and cull the herds. And they could put some breeding stock out there and build up nicer herds and do something with them. But Iôm not a horse person, either.

RM: So youôve seen the roundups with helicopters?

MA: Oh, yes, a few years ago. Itôs really sad. And they get skinny, and they compete

with the cattle for the water and so on. There have been a lot of cattle issues with one rancher here.

RM: You mean Ben Colvin?

MA: Ben Colvin.

RM: Yes, I interviewed Ben. His story is shocking.

MA: It is, and Iôm on his side all the way. When they have the right to come and take your personal property and sell it, we have some issues with that. I was talking to Ben one day and he was talking about his cattle. I said, ñItôs your cattle today; it might be somebodyôs car or house tomorrow. Where do you stop?ò I mean, the cattle are his property; the government didnôt own them. The BLM or the Department of the Interior came and seized his property.

RM: They seized his cows.

MA: And sold them. Thatôs like somebody coming and taking your car and selling it. There was a grand jury. Itôs been a while back, but I think Ben basically got screwed out of his personal property. I think they were asking for fees and he said he didnôt owe them fees because he could prove ownership of the range back for so many years. Whether he was right or wrong, if they seized his cows, I donôt think they had any right to sell them. They could have seized them and then told him, ñHere, put them somewhere else.ò

CHAPTER TWO

RM: Whatôs your take on wilderness issues in Esmeralda County?

MA: In the last couple of years there was a thing where they wanted to make a big wilderness area here. And my question to them was this: ñIs the area okay now?ò

ñItôs in fine shape now.ò

ñIf itôs in fine shape now, then itôs okay. What are you trying to fix?ò

When you get a wilderness area, thereôs a lot of a baggage that goes along with it: You canôt do this, you canôt do that. Well, the people that I know and my friends and myself, we go out in the desert all the time. I love it out here in the desertð the solitude and all that. Itôs fine after all these years of people living here; nothing needs to be fixed.

I think itôs special interest groups, people not from around hereð I donôt think they have any members of their organizations around hereð who are looking at land here while theyôre living over in California where there might be houses for miles and miles and miles. They think, ñLetôs protect that place.ò

Well, we donôt need you to come over and tell us what to do. I know itôs supposed to be public land for all the people, but thereôs a population that lives here, too. I did see a map of a lot of the areas that I know and that Iôve been to many, many times, and they wanted to make wilderness of almost every mountaintop.

RM: And what would that have done to you and the other people here?

MA: It would have limited our freedom of access to property. Some wilderness, you canôt drive on. Ed Rannels and I are on the county land advisory team; Iôm new to it and Edôs been on it from the start. He and David Sweetman were trying to get a county master plan based on our own public land policy. We kind of took other countiesô plans

and instead of reinventing the wheel, we are looking at what we like, taking out what we don't like, and changing the wording. It's quite a process. We don't agree with the BLM and this way we can say, "Okay. This is our view of how we want to do this."

I know the BLM is going to look at that and say, "That isn't how we're going to do it," but you've got to take a stand one way or the other.

RM: Could you describe your view of the wilderness, or the community's view, in a nutshell?

MA: I can't speak for everybody but I can speak for myself and the majority of the people I know: We don't want the wilderness area. There's no need to have a wilderness area. There's nothing wrong with the county now, and you can go out in the hills and all so forth. I asked them, "If it's suitable for wilderness now, why wouldn't it be suitable for wilderness in 50 years? What have we done to harm it?" Like I say, there are a lot of strings that I don't understand. Maybe Ed Rannels could answer your question because he's been involved in a lot more about wilderness. The BLM have wilderness study areas and that limits us.

RM: How does the wilderness area study impact you?

MA: I'm not sure. I think Ed Rannels could probably explain that term to you a little bit better. The lands advisory people have actually made their own glossary of what Esmeralda County considers wilderness areas; these fellows have put a lot of time and effort in on it.

RM: Is the BLM listening to them?

MA: It's an advisory board and they're going to give it to the commissioners. The commissioners have the final say: "Okay, we want to reword this or reword that," or something. But at least we'll have a policy to hand the BLM and say, "This is our stance

on this issue.ò We call it public lands and they call it federally managed lands and we donôt like that.

We donôt like to call it ñfederal land,ò we call it ñpublic land.ò When itôs for a public purpose, why does the public have to pay rent on anything that they supposedly own and theyôre using for a public good? Iôm not saying that you can go build a tractor plant out here and not buy the land, but if we were using it for our wastewater plant or water plant or water wells or landfill, itôs for the public good.

We take out almost all the references to federal things and reword them because when you look at their plans, itôs all tailored towards their business and we want to tailor it to our business. We have one side of the fence, they have the other side. But at least weôll have a document showing, ñThis is how we feel. This is our stand on the wild horses, forestry, cultural areas.ò Thereôs a whole list of things.

RM: In your experience, is the federal government listening to you and the people of the local area?

MA: In my opinion, I think the federal government listens to who they can get the most votes from, and thatôs not us. I mean, poor Esmeralda County out here, we canôt actually sway a state government position, let alone any federal position. But we have to abide by all this stuff. When I moved here in 1984, this was the greatest town ever. I thought, ñMan, this is like the Wild, Wild West out here.ò But over time, the government comes in with this or that. Youôve got to do this for landfills. Youôve got to do that.

RM: Talk about landfills and things like that.

MA: Let me just start with the landfill. Clear up to the late ô90s, every area had its own dumpsiteô Goldfield had its dumpsiteô and they were open all the time. People would take their stuff to the dump and sometimes theyôd get lit on fire and it would stink when

the wind would blow in town. But then all of a sudden, weôve got to have a solid waste thing and weôve got to do this. That was because back East where the water tableôs real close to the surface, they were polluting the groundwaterð for years people went to the lowest spot and put their trash there.

So they made us have a solid waste facility. They say itôs not taxedð itôs called a special assessment. Iôll argue the point to the death with the assessorð and I love her to deathð but if a special assessment is not a tax, ñHow come it comes on my tax bill?ò So if youôre a property owner, you have to pay for solid waste but if you rent, you donôt pay for solid waste. I have an issue with that, but anyway, that was a cost. Now all the trash is brought into the Goldfield dump because we can only afford to permit one dump. So you had to hire a person, buy a truck, and buy equipment to operate the landfill and stuff. That was just one of the things.

Then with the water system and the sewer system, the sewer system in Goldfield was originally put in in 1906 or maybe even sooner. They hired 100 people and they hand-dug all these lines and they used terra cotta pipes.

RM: Define terra cotta.

MA: Terra cottaôs a clay. Actually, itôs a very durable product but it only comes in three-foot lengths and when you grout it, the roots of trees will get in. A couple of years ago we had to change that. Of course we got in more debt, but we did get some grants and we faired pretty well with something called a USDA grant. Itôs a federal grant and we got about $4 million, and we put new sewer lines here in town.

Now, you have to understand: Back in 1906, Goldfield was kind of unique. Big cities had sewer pipes but little towns usually didnôt. They started learning that disease was being caused by unsanitary conditions and thatôs when sewer systems started. So

when they were going to build a town theyôd put a sewer system in, but it just collected and went down the wash and went into a redwood tank and overflowed back into the wash.

RM: That was here at Goldfield?

MA: That was the treatment system. So thatôs all been upgraded. But they said, ñWell, youôre polluting the ground,ò and all that. Out by where our sewer plant is located now, we spent a bunch of the money that we got funded for. But still, somebody paid for it in tax dollars. And they wanted a down-grade monitoring well. They drilled a couple hundred feet and they never hit any water. So there goes $30,000 or whatever it cost to do thatð that was a waste of money. But further on down, the water is so contaminated with sulfides from the mining district that when it comes in contact with water it makes sulfuric acid. And there are all kinds of heavy metals that are naturally occurring stuff.

RM: Even before mining?

MA: Before mining, before the sewer went in there. The mines canôt even use it for processing water, and itôs just a naturally occurring thing. But anyway, we wound up with sewer ponds a couple of years ago and upgraded our sewer collection system of manholes and all that kind of thing and that was all kind of mandated by the Department of Environmental Protection.

It seems like a never-ending barrage. There was the arsenic thing. That was part of the Clean Water Act, another federally mandated thing. The western states have a problem with arsenic because we use groundwater. In the East they use a lot of surface waterð rivers and things like thatð but we donôt have that choice out here. The arsenic has leached out from whatever source and has gotten into the water, so we mitigated that. And of course we had leaky pipes, so we had to put in a new water system and a new

water tank. Anyway, we're in pretty good shape now. When this guy, Kevin Keating from the mining company, was asking me about how the infrastructure is in town and could we take on and 60 or 100 families, I think we're well prepared to do it.

RM: That's great.

MA: I'm really looking forward to seeing some more mining. I mean, we're a mining town. Let's get some mines going.

RM: I agree. How about the power here? Has that caused any problems or land issues?

MA: Goldfield is on the end of an extension cord. Goldfield's power comes into town and it doesn't loop back out of here. So if something happens on the transmission lines coming in, we're out of power. We've been out of power for two days at a time.

RM: Have the land issues affected your power availability here or the costs or anything?

MA: I don't know. I just know that when NV Energy took over from Sierra Pacific, our service costs a lot more for power and you can hardly get them to come out here. They actually shut down their office where you could pay your bill– you have to go to Scolari's to pay it. I knew those fellows when they worked for Sierra Pacific and it's kind of like the BLM people– their hands are tied. They work for another company now, and they're not allowed to come and just put in a pole; they've got to have an engineer look at it. They've got to put in another transformer; they've got to do this or that.

RM: And that's company policy, not a federal land policy?

MA: That's NV Energy policy.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: You got to Goldfield right at the kind of the tail end of the proposed MX plan, didn't you?

MA: Yes.

RM: Do you have any thoughts about that— because they took over a lot of land.

MA: I just know what I read about the MX. Looking back, I would say, did we need it? No. We didn't need it. The country didn't need it.

RM: But they were going to take over a huge proportion of Nevada.

MA: And make us a big target.

RM: What do you think about the proposed nuclear waste storage facility at Yucca Mountain? What's your perception and the local people's perception of that, in your view?

MA: Again, it's a mixed thing. I was on the Yucca Mountain Citizens Advisory Board for ten or 12 years. I guess technically we still have that board, but we haven't met in a long time.

RM: How did the board work?

MA: Every month we used to meet and talk over what was going on with Yucca Mountain. At that time the license process hasn't even started. They were still looking into the feasibility and they were still drilling and doing the heater test and all that kind of thing. I've been through Yucca Mountain three or four times, and we went to some nuclear power plants and to where they were storing fuel rods.

My perspective on the whole thing is this: It would be good for the economy of Nevada. A lot of people say, "Oh, you don't want to fill that up because we're not a

waste land and you're going to pollute that thing.ò I think we're smart enough human beings not to do that. But to me, that's a small thing.

My biggest issue is that I think it's a national security problem when you have highly radioactive nuclear fuel rods sitting in casks in fenced-in areas in a hundred-and-some places all over the United States. It just makes sense to put them in one place so you can secure them.

In Nevada, most of the opponents to Yucca Mountain are not from the rural areas, I don't think. Most opponents are, of course, in Las Vegas and Carson City. The politics of saying, ñThis will be good for the economyò won't work with them because we don't carry enough votes. I mean, in Nevada, out of 17 counties, two of them carry most of the votes in the stateð they dictate what the other 15 counties, the rural areas, are going to do. But I think not only would it be good for the economy, there would have been a lot of high-paying, highly scientific jobs. It would have helped the universities and schools and I think it could have been done safely.

Also, we could have had a train through here and we could have had an economic benefit from rail traffic. A train would boost the economy of the state tremendously. It would boost the mining industry tremendously because there are a lot of minerals here in this county like sulfur and things that are used in processing. There's more than just gold and silver that has to be mined. I know there are good deposits of silica and feldspar and talc, but getting them to a railhead or trucking them makes it so it's not economically feasible. If you had a railroad spur coming through here where you could have warehousing and get stuff to market, it would be an economic boon for the county and the whole state.

I think Yucca Mountain got to be a political thing. Votes are what keep you in

office and in your job and thatôs why we donôt have Yucca Mountain. I think the scientists proved that itôs feasible and, like I say, itôs certainly safer than having this material sitting all over the country. But you have Harry Reidð he should have retired a long time ago; I think heôs just over. Heôs gotten too powerful, too big for his britches. He represents Las Vegas, I think, and of course, Washoe County. But I think the big picture should be looked at.

A lot of people say, ñOh, itôs going to pollute everything.ò Well, if they can keep the stuff safe in a hundred different places, we can keep it safe here. And it would be safer here because youôd only have to protect one place. Iôve been all over the Nevada Test Site and there are some contaminated places out there where they did above-ground testing. In my opinion, itôs helped the country not be (?) Iran or somethingð the big red scare. I think our nuclear deterrent saved us. I donôt agree with all the wars that the United States has always done, but I think if we ever got to be No. 2, somebody would want to come over and knock us down. They tried with 9/11, but that didnôt work. That just galvanized us in a different way.

Itôs been a long time since Iôve actually been looking at Yucca Mountain. I was there when they were testing the rocks and so forth. Iôm not a geologist, but they had a lot of very smart peopleð they hired the best people they could to get the best science they could. Then, after billions of dollars were spent, the politicians are questioning the science. Well, thereôs a certain pointð are you just going to toss away a billion dollars worth of stuff? And you havenôt mitigated the main problem, the nuclear waste, which is a national security problem.

When the Nuclear Policy Act was written, the nuclear power plants were promised a repository. And now weôre looking at maybe relicensing and maybe actually

building some new plants. I know that alternative energy is a big thing here, and I think we could really develop it. But I think Yucca Mountain needs to be relooked at, and not politicized. I mean, get the politicians out of it. Let the scientists look at it and if the scientists say, ñNo, we can't do this,ò then, okay, let's not do that. But I think they had some pretty smart people working on it. When you read the reports, we paid that for those reports, and that's the best we're going to get. If the reports say it's okay, it's okay.

RM: Right. If you were called on to advise the DOE on how to work with the people of Nevada and put the program over in the future, what kinds of advice would you offer?

MA: I think they need to be more upfront. In the past they've done some things where they lost the people's confidence. The DOE is run by a political machine and as long as the political machine is not letting them go forward, the DOE's hands are kind of tied. I think the licensing process ought to continue to go through. And if it's found that they can get a license and the science is solid and all that, I think they ought to build Yucca Mountain and the railroad that goes with it. Like I say, and I can't emphasize this enough, they should mitigate the potential future hazards of this stuff lying everywhere; it needs to be brought into one location. The whole point of having a repository was to not have it all over the place.

Getting back to the nuclear power plants, the rate-payers who use nuclear power have been paying an assessment on their power bills for years to pay for this repository. Now all of a sudden the repository's not there and they have a legitimate concern. It costs them money to store this stuff in dry cask storage above ground. (Of course, they leave it in the pools for so long and then take them out and put them in dry casks and all that stuff.) Well, it's costing the rate-payers money. I think part of that fund has been spent on things that it probably wasn't supposed to be spent on.

RM: Thereôs a lot of the fund leftð $20 billion or $18 billion or something. And theyôre still paying the rate.

MA: Theyôre still paying the rate, right, and theyôre not getting any benefit out of it. I think if the political machine would go in front of the American people and say, ñHey, look. We need to remove this military-grade stuff and these fuel rods from over 100 places because theyôre potential targets for terrorist groups,ò people would have a different take on it. And thereôs a danger of accidentsð I mean, if you put 100 tires on the road, one of them is going to have a flat.

I really think that if the science is proven, the repository should be built and the waste should be put there. I think itôs the political atmosphere of the country. Instead of, ñHey, look. We need to move this stuff,ò say, ñWe need to move this because the problem is that a lot of these power plants are near populated areas.ò They need to move that stuff away from the greater population, and itôs for the greater good of everybody, of the nation.

RM: What would be your take on building one or more nuclear power plants in Central Nevada, maybe in connection with Yucca Mountain?

MA: I have no problem with power plants. I think the biggest thing about the power plants is that they should be built to the safest standard and not to the lowest bidder. One of the issues is if you were going to build a conventional nuclear power plant, you need a considerable amount of water for cooling and power generation. I donôt know where you would put them here. I think Nevadaôs potential for power generation lies in solar and wind.

RM: They have reactors now that use very little water or even none.

MA: I donôt know a lot about those but I know that they have done them. Do they have

any actually operating?

RM: I think they do. I would love to see some in Central Nevada, because they provide good jobs. Have you toured Palo Verde in Arizona?

MA: I haven't toured Palo Verde, but I toured Prairie Island out of Red Wing, Minnesota. And I've been to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico. I've seen the Box No. 1 put in there when they first started putting this stuff down. It was a pretty cool place in the salt zone.

By the way, it's kind of misleading when you call it a "nuclear waste repository," because it's actually a repository where they can retrieve it.

RM: There's more energy in all of our spent fuel in America than in Saudi Arabia.

MA: They can get more power out because those rods are highly radioactive but they're not completely spent when they take them out. They're not efficient enough, so they pull them out. I don't know if you've ever seen them when they re-rod a reactor, but the rods don't have any shielding at all. They're only very slightly radioactive. Until they go into the reactor itself and they become part of the reaction core, they're not really that radioactive.

The remnants of the uranium mining from back in the early '80s are still there. You go to New Mexico and Colorado and Utah where they were actually mining uranium— there was all sorts of uranium. Then they said, "Well, we can buy the uranium cheaper" outside the US, and that put everybody out of work. Then they don't get taxes anymore. That's what all our out-sourcing does. And of course this is why we have our economy today— everything is made in China. We don't want to be buying radioactive rods for our reactors made in China. I mean, come on. [Laughs]

RM: What do you think about reprocessing the fuel and the second- and third-

generation-type reactors?

MA: I heard that at Hanford they have a breeder reactor that was completely built and never used. They built that breeder reactor for probably billions of dollars. Iôm sure technology has changed now. The problem back then was when you process this waste, you create more waste that has to be dealt withð radioactive acids and so forth. Iôm not sure exactly how that works, but thatôs what Iôve learned from going around and reading different things.

RM: The French have solved that problem, and so have other countries.

MA: And France also has underground repositories; 90 percent of their power comes from nuclear power plants. The French also did something really smart: They have one power plant design and they all use the same design. Theyôre not always different, with things going to the lowest bidder.

Iôm sure that the safety is well designed in these. I know you had your Chernobylð of course, they didnôt have any containment over it. That was asking for problems. And then you had the Japan thing, which is a natural disaster. Japanôs a little island. It has a population about the size of the United States on that islandð 300-and-some million people, I think.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Whatôs your take on the Sagebrush Rebellion? And how does it fit the overall picture in Esmeralda County?

MA: What do you mean?

RM: The protest of federal government control of lands in central Nevada that happened back in the ô80s. I guess some of the things youôre talking about are part of the Sagebrush Rebellion generally. In other words, we have too much federal meddling on public land.

MA: Thereôs no doubt about it. I think in general, people have too much federal meddling in their daily lives wherever they live in the United States. The federal governmentôs just getting bigger and bigger and bigger and it actually should be getting smaller and smaller and smaller, I think. What are they regulating? So what if somebody camps out there?

I donôt know a whole lot about the Sagebrush Rebellion. My take on it was that they were saying we should secede from the United States. [Laughs] About 16 or 17 years ago I was at a meeting in Reno and this guy from Hawaii and I were talking about landfill issues. All these people flew in from all over the United States. He said, ñYou guys donôt understand. The people in central Nevada, they want to secede from the Union.ò

I started laughing. I said, ñWell, yeah. Thatôs about right.ò

Thatôs when Bentonôs stuff was going on. The ranches here are not like farms back East where you can have 80 cows on 80 acres. You need thousands of acres for 80 cows. But when the government starts coming and telling ranchers who have been here

for a hundred years how theyôve got to move their cows and all this stuff, I think the ranchers have a legitimate concern. I think the federal government, instead of listening to them, tried to push them, and it got to be a push-and-shove match. It didnôt help the image of the federal government any.

RM: Is there any other way that these land issues impinge on your job?

MA: With the BLM, we have to keep up with our permits and all that. As far as the public land, itôs maybe not my job, but itôs certainly our life. Esmeralda County is, like, 98 percent publicly owned land so thereôs very little room for expansion. And I think the BLM really overvalues the land when we try to purchase any. It was all public land around Vegas, but when Vegas got larger, everything kind of got pushed aside because they didnôt want to stop progress. But when it comes to out here, the land belongs to everybody and they want to keep it just like this. Well, thatôs fine, but how many people from Maine are going to be here looking at their part of the land? Myself, Iôd like to see a cow on my land. They can have my sagebrush. [Laughs]

Thereôre some economic benefits that could be done besides just mining. When I first moved here, a lot of people had mining claims and they changed the mining laws. Iôll admit, there were a lot of promoters all over the place and there were claim posts everywhere. But the county also got revenue off that. When they changed the laws, the bottom dropped out of our revenue.

RM: Oh, really?

MA: Oh, yes. You can only have, I think, ten claims now and before, theyôd have hundreds of claims. Granted, there were promoters that just claimed swaths of land. But all those promoters bought food and gas and went to the bars and had to have a home to live in and all that. When they changed the mining laws, I think it really hurt the

economy here. I don't think the federal government really cares about us out here at all. Like I say, we don't carry enough votes. We're kind of like the crazy folks that live out back.

RM: Where are these issues going to be in ten or 20 years, looking in your crystal ball?

MA: You're talking about the land issues?

RM: Yes.

MA: I think we'll be in a better position once we have done our master plan for the county land policy. Maybe they'll relax some of their regulations. Like the mining— they had to fast-track some economic things. Let's face it, you can save all the land you want, but nobody would be here if it wasn't for the mining and the exploitation of the resources of the state. I think Nevada has a lot to offer as far as minerals and all kinds of different things. For instance, we have a cool county seal. It's got mining, it's got the outdoors— a bighorn sheep— and then it's got ranching. That kind of covers the whole county.

I'd like to see the government lessen their restrictions. We don't need any wilderness designations. There's no benefit to us to have wilderness here and I don't think there's any benefit to the citizens of the United States, actually. I think they need to let go of some more land so that we can really develop some solar energy. Solar power is really, I think, a thing of the future. I don't think it's going to replace the nuclear power plants or anything, but it can definitely make a dent.

The county government actually has two solar projects. We did one in Silver Peak and one is up on top of the courthouse. It's lowered our power bill significantly, by hundreds of dollars a month. Even though it gets cloudy, the sun shines here every day. I think that would be a good benefit for the people here.

The Tonopah Test Range and the Nevada Test Site and, of course, Yucca

Mountain are not going to go back to public land use but thereôs potential for a lot of good scientific work to be done there. Itôd be nice to get the universities some money to do work on power. I think Nevada could be a leading power generator because weôre so close to California, which is an absolute power consumer, and they donôt want to build more power plants because they pollute too much.

RM: We could be supplying much of the power for the whole West.

MA: Well, the Pacific Northwest has rivers and dams so theyôre pretty okay on power.

RM: Yes, but California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah could use it.

MA: I know theyôre shutting down one coal-fired power plant here; I think itôs right by Utah.

RM: Theyôre shutting down several of them, I think in New Mexico or the Navajo Reservation. They shut down the one at Bullhead City that was burning coal from the Navajo Reservation.

MA: I thought that thing was burning natural gas.

RM: No, this one was coal and was very polluting.

MA: Thereôs a lot of wind here, and mostly solar. I was really impressed how much that solar panel saved us.

RM: Thatôs amazing. Whatôs your take on global warming in terms of these issues?

MA: I think when you put billions of tons of carbon into the air, somethingôs going to happen. Everything man does, it pollutes. I think nuclear power is probably the least polluting as far as a conventional power plant goes, but solar and wind power are even better. We also have a lot of potential with geothermal power.

Iôd like to see a transmission power line come through, and a railroad. It kind of amazed me when they were looking at Yucca Mountain and how many billions of dollars

it would cost to build a railroad. I said, ñWow. They discovered Goldfield in 1902 and by 1906, it had four railroads coming into it.ò What havenôt we learned here? I mean, come onð they were doing it with donkeys and weôve got earth-moving equipment now.

RM: Thatôs a great point. Looking into the future, what would your predictions, if any, be on the future of Yucca Mountain?

MA: Iôm hoping the next administration will look at it. If the current administration gets back in, I donôt think itôs going to go anywhere for another four years. As I said, I think all this stuff was done on political promises for votes and not on the scienceð I wholeheartedly believe that. I say, ñLet the scientists decide, not the politicians, if this is safe.ò

RM: Is there anything else on these issues that you would like to say?

MA: To recap, I really think that they should let the scientists do Yucca Mountain and get all the politicians out of it. I think itôs a grave mistake to leave all that waste lying around in so many places because those casks are only strong as the missile you shoot. Theyôre good targets for enemies of the United States which, unfortunately, we have a whole bunch of them. And I think you could put a railroad through here. I think you could secure that material and that would be so good for the universities and the schools and youôd have high-paying, very good jobs for scientists for years, probably.

RM: It could be a whole new future.

MA: Right. It could be like legalizing gaming was for the state.

RM: Good example.

MA: I think itôs a national problem. We canôt look at it as a Nevada problem, itôs a national problem.

RM: Thatôs right. Itôs a world problem.

MA: Itôs a world problem, actually. The French have been doing it. I hate to follow their example specifically, but theyôve been doing it and theyôve been doing it all right. Theyôre not going to open up the Test Site for public use anymore. If theyôre going to build a world-class nuclear research facility, thatôs the only logical place to put it. I mean, the property is already there. In the ô90s they stopped the underground testing and all that. Well, they have this facility and all this land and what are they going to do with it? There used to be a lot of workers there. It was a big economy, I think, for Las Vegas. Thereôs a four-lane highway right up to Mercury. They need to find something to replace the Test Site with. Iôm not saying to start bombing again by any means. But itôs close enough to Las Vegas, and it would be a world-class center.

RM: There were great plans for Yucca Mountain but it never went anywhere because of Senator Reid and those guys.

MA: Reidôs whole thing is his political agenda. He made promises: ñIôll fight this,ò and all that. But I mean, you have this huge facility. And Iôve been on itð you can go 60 miles and just drive, drive, drive. Thereôs infrastructure out there so you donôt have to start from scratch. And itôs already been removed from public use.

RM: I asked Senator Chic Hecht at a meeting I had with him before he died, ñHow did Harry Reid and Dick Bryan know at the very beginning this was a really good issue?ò

He said, ñFear always makes a good issue for a politician.ò

MA: You need people to be afraid of something.

RM: Iôm afraid so. Well, thank you so much for talking with me. This has been really interesting and informative.

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